

ARTICLE 8

PARTNERSHIPS, COLLABORATIVE LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS, AND PRE-DECISIONAL INVOLVEMENT

1. Consistent with the preamble of this Master Agreement and the principles of the Strategic Plan for Labor Management Relations in the Forest Service, the National Parties agree to work collaboratively, and they encourage parties at all levels to adopt and practice collaborative labor relations to enhance the principles of mutual: trust, accountability, understanding, and respect. Through the joint development, implementation, and maintenance of a Strategic Plan for Labor Management Relations in the Forest Service, the National Parties will provide current guidance and assistance in maintaining and enhancing collaborative relationships at all levels.

2. Partnership Councils:

- a. The parties serve as full partners to identify problems and craft solutions to better serve the Agency's employees, mission, and the public.
- b. The National Parties agree to maintain a national Forest Service Partnership Council (FSPC) to address issues of service-wide scope and significance subject to the terms of the Partnership Agreement.
- c. The parties at intermediate and Local levels have the authority to establish Partnership Councils at those levels.
- d. The members of each Partnership Council are the designated representatives of Management and the Union. The size and any specific objectives of Partnership Councils at all levels will be established jointly.
- e. An attempt will be made to use consensus- and interest-based problem solving to resolve all the issues the Partnership Councils agree to address.
- f. Upon mutual agreement, the parties may discuss any issues in Partnership even if they involve Management or Union rights. However, decisions and agreements reached by the parties in Partnership are binding on the parties to the extent

permitted by law and governmentwide rule or regulation, or required by executive order.

3. Collaborative Relations:

- a. The parties are encouraged to engage in informal and formal processes to identify problems and craft solutions to better serve the Agency's employees, mission, and the public.
- b. Use of interest-based problem solving to resolve issues outside of Partnership Councils is strongly encouraged.
- c. Decisions and agreements reached by the parties in collaboration are binding on the parties to the extent permitted by law and governmentwide rule or regulation, or required by executive order.

4. Pre-decisional Involvement:

- a. The parties will notify one another of emerging topics or initiatives that may affect conditions of employment as soon as practical unless mitigating circumstances prevail. They are encouraged to become pre-decisionally involved in an effort to facilitate the early identification and resolution of issues and provide the opportunity for participants to add value to the outcome.

5. Changes to Organizations and/or Redistribution of Duties:

- a. Management will inform the Union about proposed changes before a final decision is made on the following matters:
 - 1. The establishment or abolishment of any position(s) resulting in changes to the organizational structure that may affect bargaining unit employees. Examples include, but are not limited to, organizational realignments; eliminations, addition, or redistribution of program functions; change in position locations between subunits within the same Management unit; and/or the transfer, consolidation, or merger of two or more line units at, or above, the ranger-district or research-project level.

and/or

2. The redistribution of ongoing duties among existing positions that substantially affects more than one position in such a way that it requires modification of the position descriptions in accordance with Article 14.1.
- b. In discussing such information, Management will include plans for identifying any individual bargaining unit position for abolishment.
- c. The appropriate level at which discussions occur depends on the scope of the organizational changes being considered (for example, Local, intermediate, national).
- d. If issues associated with the above changes are not resolved collaboratively between the parties, and when Management determines to make such changes, they will notify the Union and negotiate as appropriate. Note that not all matters discussed under pre-decisional involvement are subject to negotiations under Article 11. The parties are advised to evaluate the negotiability of issues not resolved collaboratively before proceeding with negotiations.

6. Resources:

- a. The parties are encouraged to use resources from various sources in pursuing a collaborative Labor-Management relationship, including the formation and maintenance of Partnership Councils, Labor-Management Committees, or other forums. Toward that end, Management will maintain a Web site accessible to the parties that contains, or is linked to, appropriate reference materials. Materials will include minutes of the FSPC and other jointly issued guidance from the National Parties.
- b. The ability to resolve issues by consensus is important to effective collaborative relations. The parties are encouraged to obtain training in interest-based problem solving, FLRA statutory training, and alternative dispute resolution.